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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 024537

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IZ](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: PRC/SYRIA: NO VISITS PLANNED, MFA PROVIDES READOUT  
OF RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH ISRAEL, DAMASCUS

REF: STATE 197800

Classified By: Political External Unit Chief Edgard Kagan. Reasons 1.4  
(b/d).

Summary

1. (C) China has no plans for a high-level visit by Syrian officials, according to MFA Levant Division Director Chen Weiqing. Providing a readout of Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun's December 6-8 trip to Israel, Ramallah and Syria, Chen said that Israeli officials asked the PRC to urge Syria to help secure the release of the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hezbollah in July. China pushed for Syria to play a more positive role in Lebanon, Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, with particular emphasis on the need to support UNSC Resolution 1701. Syria stressed its desire to initiate a dialogue with the United States and willingness to cooperate on regional issues, according to Chen, who acknowledged that Syrian actions in neighboring countries were potentially dangerous. End Summary.

No Visits Planned

2. (C) China has no plans at present to invite the Syrian government for a high-level visit, MFA West Asian and North African Division Director Chen Weiqing informed Poloffs on December 14 in response to reftel. Chen said he will report our concerns to his superiors, adding he understood the United States' view that international travel by Bashar al-Asad could send a bad signal.

Readout on Discussions with Israel and PA

3. (C) Noting that he had accompanied Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun on a visit to Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Syria December 6-8, Chen said Israeli officials urged China to use its influence to push Syria and Iran to play a more constructive role in the region. They also asked the PRC to urge Syria to help secure the release of the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hezbollah in July. Chen commented that Zhai passed this message and that the Syrian response was to claim that Israel is holding approximately 20 Syrian nationals and that Damascus would like to see progress on their cases. Chen said Zhai urged Israel to work with the Palestinian Authority and to avoid provocative actions in Lebanon.

4. (C) Stressing his desire for peace, PA President Mahmoud Abbas highlighted Syria's influence on the Israel-Palestine issue and asked China to urge Syria to push HAMAS to behave

constructively, according to Chen.

Syria: We Want Dialogue with the United States

15. (C) Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem highlighted the Syrian desire to start a dialogue with the United States in order to cooperate on regional issues. Moualem stressed Syria's desire to be treated with the respect appropriate to its "important role in the region," according to Chen. Moualem informed Zhai that Syria wants the United States to pressure Israel to resume the Middle East Peace Process and discuss return of the Golan Heights, according to Chen. Zhai in turn urged Syria to influence HAMAS toward actions more conducive to establishing peace, said Chen.

16. (C) Syrian officials told Zhai that Iraq's Constitution should be amended to better reflect the interests of different ethnic and religious groups, said Chen. Moualem told Zhai the upcoming Kirkuk referendum was of concern for Syria and Turkey, said Chen, who noted that the Turkish President was also visiting Damascus at the time. Zhai told Moualem that Iraq's internal security is important to the security of the entire region and Syria should be more helpful in that regard, reported Chen.

17. (C) Moualem told Zhai that Syria had cooperated with the special UN tribunal on Lebanon, complying with a withdrawal of Syrian forces, claimed Chen. Moualem noted to Zhai that anti-Syria elements in Lebanon exaggerate Syria's role in the country's affairs. According to Chen, China specifically asked Syria to support rather than undermine UNSC Resolution 1701.

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Syria Knows What it Needs To Do

18. (C) Acknowledging that Syria appears to be trying to get attention by undermining regional security, Chen stated that Zhai told Moualem that Syria should play a more positive and constructive role in order to support regional stability. Expressing appreciation for PRC efforts to encourage Syria to behave in a more responsible manner, Poloffs stressed that Syria has caused its own isolation and knows what it must do to have a dialogue with the United States. Noting that Syria's dangerous behavior in Iraq, Lebanon and Israel and the Occupied Territories poses a serious threat to regional peace and stability, Poloffs urged Beijing to redouble its efforts to convince Syria of the need to behave more responsibly.  
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